



# FIA Matters!

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Produced by FIA Office of Communications, Suite 1510, Grand Tower, Lansing  
Submit stories by e-mail to [FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov)

## Today's big story

### FIA packages for working military dogs

Information: Linda Cunningham

Hillsdale County Family Independence Agency, Hillsdale

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Hillsdale County Family Independence Agency employees provide assistance to more than people in the county. Some of them started a program called **Packages for Armed Services Working Dogs**, a project that got under way when FIA employees were sending packages to employees relatives stationed in Kuwait and Cuba.

"We had a little money left over from a fundraiser and our clerical supervisor, **Lori Stettler**, wondered if there were dogs in the military stationed overseas that we could send some treats to,"



**Military dogs like Rocko, seen here with his handler, were the subject of Hillsdale County staff & community largess.**

the manufacturer who provided them with the bowls at manufacturer cost. She said handlers asked for rawhide treats, dog shampoo, clippers, goggles and boots for the dogs and a few human needs.

"They asked...if they weren't being too greedy...for real coffee – not instant – beef jerky and DVDs," Cunningham said. "That comment choked me up, to think what they are doing and then they think they are being greedy by asking for little things.

"We are now up to 57 teams stationed in eight different areas with four additional dog-less soldiers thrown in. Nine teams are in Afghanistan, 20 in Kuwait and the rest in Iraq. Four of the handlers are women. They are all Army with the exception of seven Air Force and one Navy handler assigned with the Army groups." She said Hillsdale FIA staff and members of the community have donated about \$2,000 worth of items and money for the canine project. "We have now sent out about 30 care package for the dogs and the guys, including Easter baskets for each handler and dog."

■ For more on military service dogs go to [http://www4.army.mil/ocpa/read.php?story\\_id\\_key=5834](http://www4.army.mil/ocpa/read.php?story_id_key=5834)

## FIA Matters!

About 120 employees submitted ideas and ballots for naming this newsletter and the name **FIA Matters!** received more votes than any other. **Brenda Piekarski**, the director's secretary at Macomb County FIA in Clinton Township, submitted the name.

"This name has a very positive dual meaning," Brenda said. "It means that we, FIA, matter in the big picture of the community, state and nation. It also means that our work, personally and as an agency, matters. I feel this gives automatic recognition that the content of the newsletter is important."

The name was also selected because it can transfer to another agency name and acronym. Other popular name suggestions that received numerous votes were **FIA Profile**, **Michigan's Finest In Action**, and **Connections**. Congratulations Brenda!

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## FIA employee suggestion gets “Mooch” and nets \$5,000 for school

What do an FIA employee, an office supply company, a southeastern Michigan high school and Detroit Lions head coach Steve “Mooch” Mariucci have in common? How about \$5,000 for the school?

Mariucci was at Allen Park High School March 19 as a result of the Staples “Coach of the Week” program. Through the program, one school, chosen at random from a lottery from the Coach of the Week’s state gets a visit from the coach. Schools that are selected from the Staples Sweepstake receive \$5,000 for supplies.

**Darlene Taylor**, who dropped the high school’s name into the sweepstakes, received a \$50 gift card from Staples. Darlene is a family independence specialist in Monroe County. “By entering the Allen Park High School’s name in a sweepstakes, she won \$5,000 for the school and a \$50 gift card from

Staples for herself,” said **Cynthia Maritato**, interim director of Monroe County FIA. “Ms. Taylor entered the contest as the parent of an Allen Park High School student.”



**Darlene Taylor**



**Steve Mariucci**



**Cynthia Maritato**

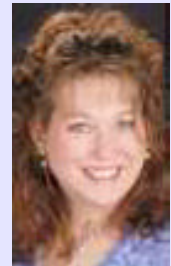
In this case, the coach and the school came from the same city since the Lions training facility and headquarters are in Allen Park.

“I enjoy being around kids of all ages, really particularly high school-age kids,” Mariucci told the Southgate News-Herald March 24. “I have a special fondness for (student athletes) and Allen Park High School’s been very successful academically and athletically. It was a privilege for me to be here.”

The school gave shirts to Mariucci and Staples representatives and made them honorary members of the Allen Park Jaguars family. As the winning school, Allen Park was featured on an “NFL Today” show that highlighted Mariucci last Dec. 7. Allen Park is a 31,000-population suburb of Detroit.

## FIA employee wins title

The new National Mrs. Asparagus Queen is a FIA employee – **Kendra Masunas**, a Children’s Protective Services specialist for Oceana County Family Independence Agency in Hart. She is married to David Masunas and they have two children, Alexis, age 4; and Ryan, 18 months.



**Kendra Masunas**  
Photo from Oceana’s  
Herald Journal

“I am interested in (being) Mrs. Asparagus to help promote an industry that is so essential for Oceana’s County,” she told the Oceana Herald-Journal. “Growing up on a farm, I understand the importance of the asparagus industry for the economic and employment growth of our community. As Mrs. Asparagus I hope to bring positive publicity and education for the asparagus industry as a way to help increase awareness on the benefits of this crop.”

Kendra was sponsored in the competition by Greiner’s Rainbow Acres and was awarded the 31<sup>st</sup> annual award at the Mrs. Asparagus Banquet & Pageant April 10 in Shelby. She will serve in the role for one year.

**FIA Matters! is an employee newsletter based on employee input. Do you have a story to tell? Did something noteworthy (or not so noteworthy) happen in your county? Did something interesting happen to an FIA staff person in your county? Do you have something you want to share with other FIA staff? Got a photo you think other FIA staff should see? Send it all to [FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov)**

## Attention NERE employees

It’s once again open enrollment time for completing the Non-Exclusively Represented Employee (NERE) Employment Preference Record (FIA-4329). The Personnel Services, Selection Support Unit will be accepting new or revised forms through the month of May.

The FIA-4329 form is used by non-exclusively represented employees to indicate their bumping and layoff preferences. Failure to have this form on record will be viewed as if the employee has chosen their current county only for bumping. Employees should complete this form if they have been newly appointed to a NERE position, moved from one NERE position to another or during May which is the open window period.

The form is available from your local personnel office, or by contacting the Selection Support Unit at (517) 241-1878, (517) 241-1875 or (517) 373-3119. Once completed the forms should be mailed to the Selection Support Unit, Personnel Services, Grand Tower Building, Suite 708, Lansing, MI 48909.



## Reading is FIA-damental

Information: Dan Carley  
Community Resource Coordinator  
Clinton-Gratiot County Family Independence Agency  
[CarleyD2@michigan.gov](mailto:CarleyD2@michigan.gov)

On March 24-25, staff from both the Clinton & Gratiot Family Independence Agency offices took time from their busy days to volunteer and read their favorite stories to children in both counties. The event was in conjunction with other reading activities held during March, which was designated as the "Reading Month".

The photos include staff from the Clinton and Gratiot offices volunteering and reading one of their favorite books to local Head Start day care children.

In Ithaca (top), [Lisa Wise](#) reads to children and [Amy Bryne](#) look on. Both workers are with Gratiot County FIA. In St. Johns (below), [Edith Smith](#) reads while both [Dawn Timm](#) & [Maggie Maniez](#) look on. These staff members are from Clinton County Family Independence Agency.

Other staff members that participated and are not pictured are [Bridget Vermeesch](#) (Gratiot County), [Dan Carley](#) and Clinton-Gratiot County director [Jan Baszler](#). "We all enjoyed it and look forward to doing something similar again next year," Carley said.



## Save time & money by videoconferencing

Information: Janet Waterstadt  
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FIA staff can save time and reduce travel expenses by using our videoconferencing systems to hold meetings with field staff, deliver training, and attend hearings. These events can take 30 minutes or several hours, and just a few people or a hundred people can attend them. The videoconferencing systems work by transmitting audio and video data over telephone lines, allowing groups at two or more locations to simultaneously see and hear each other on a large television screen. One of the nice features of our systems is that we can connect with three sites at once. For example, you can start a call in Lansing and connect with Escanaba, Grand Rapids, and Saginaw.

We have videoconferencing systems located at the: Adrian Training School, Adrian; Arbor Heights Center, Ann Arbor; Bay Pines Center, Escanaba; Cadillac Place, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Training Room, Detroit; Dearborn Training Center, Dearborn; Escanaba Training Center, Escanaba; Gaylord Training Center, Gaylord; Grand Rapids Training Center, Grand Rapids; Grand Tower, Room 1A, 10B, and 15A, Lansing; Juvenile Justice Training Center, Whitmore Lake; Kalamazoo Training Center, Kalamazoo; Lansing Training Center, Lansing; Nokomis Challenge Center, Prudenville; Novi Training Center, Novi; Saginaw Training Center, Saginaw; Shawano Center, Grayling; W.J. Maxey Training School, Whitmore Lake.

We can also connect with videoconferencing sites at many colleges and universities, intermediate school districts, hospitals, and other branches of local, state, and federal government. Although some people are intimidated by the technology, there is no need to be. Videoconferencing is very easy to learn and use. If your office or work unit would like to learn how, call Steve Barosko, Office of Professional Development, at (517) 334-6981, to schedule a demonstration and training session.

## Harvard announces no tuition for low-income students

Know a college-bound low-income student looking for a quality education? Cambridge, Mass.-based Harvard College announced March 1 that undergraduate students from low-income families currently enrolled or accepted for the new school year will pay no tuition from now on. Parents in families with incomes of less than \$40,000 will no longer be expected to contribute to the cost of attending Harvard for their children. For more go to <http://adm-is.fas.harvard.edu/FAO/index.htm>

News you can use



**Date:** April 8

**To:** William Jenness, Administrative Law Judge

**Subj:** Note of appreciation

Thank you for your professional conduct yesterday during the hearing. I am certain you conduct many hearings and receive few compliments, but you are now getting one from me. I appreciated your approach; you were not demeaning to the client or myself. Earlier in the year I had a very bad hearing experience and have been apprehensive about hearings since that time. I appreciated how your questions, instructions, and tone of voice put the client and me at ease. When participants are at ease, it is easier for both parties to present their testimony in a logical manner. I appreciated your courtesy, patience and respect. I am copying this memo to your supervisor to affirm the professional conduct of the hearing.

**Brenda Hodson, Family Independence Manager  
Muskegon County FIA, Muskegon**

Your letters,  
intercepted  
and otherwise

**Date:** April 6

**To:** Kelly Jorgenson, Family Independence Specialist  
Baraga County Family Independence Agency, Baraga

**Subj:** Thank you

Thank you so very much for all your assistance in getting us placed so quickly. We could have never done it without you! The girls and I appreciate everything that you have done for us. We are very pleased with our new home. This would not be possible if you did not step in! Just letting you know that your position at FIA as our case worker has been an

absolute joy! And we are so very grateful for your help in this sensitive matter. Thank you again!

**Barbara MacDonald, Katelyn & Kristin Kelly**

**Baraga**

■ Donna MacIntosh of Baraga FIA submitted this letter for publication.

**Date:** March 30

**To:** Christopher Stabile, CPS Supervisor

**Chippewa County Family Independence Agency, Sault Ste. Marie**

**Subj:** Inquiry

This is to notify you that we have reviewed the information you provided in response to questions we had concerning the (affected) children. Based upon the information you provided, the Office of Children's Ombudsman has decided not to open this case for further investigation. Please express our appreciation to the FIA Foster Care and Adoption Services staff working so diligently on behalf of these children. Thank you for your timely and thorough response to our inquiries.

**Stacie Bladen**

**Office of Children's Ombudsman, Lansing**

■ The inquiry in question covered a case related to three children and their parents. FIA Office of Children's Advocate submitted this letter for publication.

**FIA Matters!** is a product of  
Michigan's  
Family Independence Agency  
Marianne Udow, Director  
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Submit stories by e-mail to:  
[FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov)

**Date:** March 19

**To:** Debra Frick, Eligibility Specialist

**Muskegon County Family Independence Agency, Muskegon**

**Subj:** Thank you

I want to thank you for all of your work on our Food Assistance and Medicaid case. My family and I have never been in the financial position that we are currently in. It has been so hard to ask for help and to apply for assistance. You have made it not so awkward. You haven't made me feel like less of a human because of the situation I'm in. Thank you for allowing the telephone interview. It helped out tremendously since we have the one vehicle and being that the hours my husband works aren't flexible. Thank you too for answering all of my questions and for returning my phone calls so promptly. You never made me feel silly for asking a question. I'm sure you are very busy every day but you never seemed rushed or too busy to help. Thank you so much! My family and I really appreciate all that you did to help us in this tough time.

**Janna R. Smutz**

**Muskegon**

■ Submitted by Robin Brand, family independence manager from Muskegon County. "Debbie continually serves as a role model to all FIA staff," Robin said. "I would like this to publicly acknowledge her excellent customer service."